

WASHINGTON, DC – Today, Rep. Pete Stark (D-CA) introduced the Child Protection Services Workforce Improvement Act. The bill would provide states with \$500 million in matching grants over five years to improve the quality of their child protective services. States could use these grants to improve wages for child welfare workers, hire additional personnel, invest in training programs, and retain qualified workers.

“Too many children are falling victim to abuse and neglect because the state child protection services entrusted with their care are overburdened and underfunded,” Stark said. “We are seeing tragedies occurring throughout the country where children have been abused or killed because these agencies aren’t adequately doing their jobs.”

Stark’s legislation is in response to a report issued earlier this year by the General Accounting Office that found that staff problems at many child welfare agencies are hindering their ability to monitor foster care and adopted children. The GAO cited several factors responsible for this, including low wages, risk of on-the-job violence, staff shortages, high caseloads, administrative burdens such as too much paperwork, lack of support from supervisors and inadequate training for both child welfare workers and their supervisors.

“Child welfare workers are the key to improving the outcomes for vulnerable children,” Stark said. “Yet, in most cases, they are being asked to take on larger caseloads without being provided adequate training, decent wages or safe working conditions. These barriers that child welfare workers have to overcome to do their jobs can have horrific consequences for the children they are supposed to protect.”

In addition to federal matching grants, Stark’s bill would offer student loan forgiveness to child welfare workers who have been with an agency for at least two years. Secondly, it would provide a 75 percent federal match to pay for training of private child welfare workers. Finally, the bill would allow child welfare agencies to provide short-term mental health training to caseworkers.

The Child Protection Services Workforce Improvement Act has the support of the Child Welfare League of America, the Alliance for Children and Families, the National Association of Social Workers, the Catholic Charities of America and Lutheran Services in America.